

[Wednesday, 30 March 1994.]

MRS ROBERTS (Glendalough) [4.29 pm]: I move -

That this House calls on the State Government not to make changes to important community services such as education, police and fire services without full consultation with the people likely to be affected.

Mr Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I make this, my inaugural speech, to the Legislative Assembly. I am honoured to follow, as member for Glendalough, Dr Carmen Lawrence, Australia's first woman Premier. Carmen Lawrence has made an outstanding contribution to Western Australia through State Parliament, and I wish her well in her new positions, both as the federal member for Fremantle and as Minister for Human Services and Health and Minister assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women. Western Australia is indeed fortunate to have a representative of the calibre and commitment of Carmen Lawrence in the Federal Cabinet.

I thank all members of the Assembly for their warm welcome last Thursday when I was sworn in in less luminous conditions due to the power failure throughout the State. I thank members for their congratulations and general goodwill expressed since my election to this place. Being an inaugural address, I believe that it fits comfortably with the convention of this House for me to record some messages of personal thanks.

I have been blessed with the support of a wonderful family, friends and colleagues. My first thanks must go to my mother, Frances Thomas, my grandparents Charles and Olive Hopkins, and my uncle Charles Hopkins, the former Lord Mayor of the City of Perth, without whose support, encouragement and unceasing conviction in my abilities I would not have developed into the young adult with the self-assurance to take up many of the opportunities that have presented thus far in my life. I was then fortunate to be blessed with a husband, Greg Roberts, who has continued that unswerving support not just in my ability but in our family life. I sincerely thank mum, my brother Andrew, grandad, nanna, Greg, Charles, my two daughters Elizabeth and Candice, and all members of my family and the Roberts family. I would not have reached the first stage of even standing for preselection without their support.

My next thanks are to the Australian Labor Party not just for the opportunity presented in the endorsement for Glendalough, but for its role in my development over the past 16 years. I thank the support of branch members, the administrative committee and the State executive for the confidence they have shown in me. Some of my special friends who have encouraged me over the years include: Ted Cunningham, Jack Marks, Terry Burke, John Kobelke, Nick Griffiths, Kay Hallahan, Geoff Gallop, Kim Beazley, Ed Dermer, Margaret Quirk, Jim and Joan Keeling and Bill and Judith Barrett. Particular support during the by-election was given by our State parliamentary leader, Ian Taylor, and our deputy leader, Kay Hallahan, and all members of the State Parliamentary Labor Party. I congratulate Ian and Kay on the excellent start they have made as our leadership team. It will clearly be dangerous to list other key supporters in my campaign; however, I preface my remarks with the comment that this list is by no means exhaustive and I apologise in advance to those omitted. I wish to thank our State Secretary and campaign director, Mark Nolan, party president, Mark Cuomo, and assistant State Secretary, Lois Anderson. I also wish to record special thanks to other key campaign supporters such as Peter McKerrow, Geoff Donegan, John Arthur, June Belton, Margaret Clements, Sean Hawkes, former Perth City councillor Pauline O'Connor, Pam Proud, Joe Bullock and the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association of Western Australia, Carmel and Ray Ward, all booth captains, all who hosted morning teas and other functions, members of the ALP and other friends, relatives and residents of Glendalough who assisted in the campaign. I also thank former Perth City councillors for their support and involvement.

There can be no doubt that Carmen Lawrence had a large personal following, which was not some mysterious Carmen factor, but a strong reputation built up by hard work and commitment. The ALP achieved what most believed to be unachievable some six weeks prior to election day - an improvement on its 1993 result. No amount of contrary talk can take that achievement away from us, and it is a result that compares more than favourably with every other result in recent history where a party has been faced with a task of replacing a popular leader. Most importantly, I thank the electors of Glendalough for their support. I pledge to listen, to be accountable, and to act on their behalf.

Some key messages emerged when I was campaigning in Glendalough, one being an expectation for Government to consult when making major changes or decisions affecting communities. Another is that Government must be accountable. Local communities do not want Governments to be arrogant or out of touch. They demand to be consulted, and they demand that Governments are accountable for their actions. I intend to outline some of the instances where people did not believe sufficient consultation or accountability was in place. The first key area relates to schools and education. Leederville Primary School, which would have achieved its one hundredth birthday this year, was closed without proper consultation with parents, and despite powerful arguments and detailed research by parents showing that the population trend was up not down. Worse was the way that the Government continued to treat Leederville parents with contempt even after the closure. Parents had been promised that each student affected by the closure would get a \$50 allowance towards the purchase of a

new school uniform. They were promised a bus to get students to their new school and a staffed crossover on Charles Street to assist in students' safety. Each one of these promises was broken.

On 15 February 1994 *The West Australian* newspaper released a further list of school closures that would bring to four the number of schools in the Glendalough electorate to be affected. Leederville was already closed; Osborne Primary School was listed for closure; and Tuart Hill and Mt Hawthorn Primary and Junior Primary Schools were listed for amalgamation. Residents had every right to be extremely angry because it was this Government that had promised before the 1993 election 12 months' consultation with parents before any school would be closed down. During the by-election campaign, on 1 March 1994, I revealed that the City of Stirling had formally approved in principle a huge housing development adjacent to Osborne Primary School called Hamilton Lakes precinct. It comprises 1 100 single and mixed residential units as well as a sports field, landscape nursery and village greens. I further revealed that this development was expected to contain some 3 000 new residences and would have the potential to triple Osborne Primary School's population within three years. I now note that the housing development is being advertised. The example of Osborne Primary School emphasised the importance of consultation with local communities. It was unfortunate that it took a by-election and planned public rally some three weeks after the publishing of the school hit list for school communities to be listened to and for a commitment to be given not to close any school without the consent of parents. The frightening aspect is that without the by-election no notice may have been taken of parents. It could have been a repeat of the brick wall hit by the residents and ratepayers of the City of Perth.

My plea to the Government is to listen to parents and teachers and to realise that our children's future cannot be assessed solely in terms of dollars and cents. Parents, teachers and families need our support. Next to parents, teachers are the most important influence on the lives of young Western Australians. They are well aware that a quality education is the greatest gift which can be provided to young people. As a former teacher I know only too well that Western Australia has an education system of a very high standard which is served by a dedicated and professional teaching service. But I also know that our education system is under pressure because of a growing student population, Government cutbacks and the McCarrey report, which recommends greater private sector involvement. Teachers cannot do it all on their own. They need backup from the Department of Education and proper financial support for education from the State Government. Students' educational needs must be put before dollar driven school closures. Appropriate funding must be given to the education capital works budget. Top executive positions in the ministry must not be expanded at the expense of classroom and support teachers. It is beholden on Government and the community to acknowledge the key role teachers play in the educational and social development of our young people. I intend applying my first hand experience of the education system by fighting to protect teachers from any attempt to impose contracts and reduce conditions; pushing for further incentives for service in remote and regional areas; supporting the expansion of advanced skills and key teacher positions; advocating greater permanent employment opportunities for temporary teachers; and supporting the expansion of the full time preprimary program for five year olds.

I oppose any moves to reduce the conditions of TAFE staff by transferring them to the independent college award. I further deplore the decision of TAFE to renege on an undertaking to grant permanency to 160 temporary lecturers who met criteria laid down by the department. Education in Western Australia is at the crossroads. The teachers and lecturers of our young people need the support of this Parliament. While I am on the subject of schools it is also important for members to realise that schools provide an important community focus. They develop a sense of belonging and in many ways local people feel an attachment to their local school, whether or not they have children attending the school. I know that this is certainly the case with residents whom I canvassed living near the Osborne Primary School, which was established 91 years ago and is a strong part of that community. There is also often a failure to acknowledge the social and support role of schools. Schools are more than an educational institution. The nurturing environment of many smaller schools does have a positive effect on young children and may be more cost effective in the long term. Fully rounded, responsible, law abiding citizens will not emerge from large, regimented schools where children do not get the personal attention or encouragement they need. Children suppressed by fear or discipline will ultimately rebel and society will suffer the consequences.

Another key area I will address is local government and, more particularly, the way the break-up of the City of Perth was handled. A lot of rhetoric has been expressed in recent years about greater responsibility and autonomy for local government; meanwhile we are still awaiting the new local government Act which has been promised for so long. A great proportion of the electors of Glendalough live within the City of Perth in the suburbs of Wembley, West Leederville, Leederville, Mt Hawthorn and North Perth. Despite earlier denials by the Government and its promise of a referendum at the 1993 State election, the destruction of the Perth City Council was forced on ratepayers and residents with no consultation whatsoever. The Government went ahead despite a petition containing over 12 000 signatures, and against a hastily convened council referendum in which 90 per cent of those who voted opposed the break-up of the Perth City Council. A year earlier the same people had said that severing residential areas from the city would result in a doubling of the rates. The same people are now saying that that will not occur; yet they make that statement as the commissioners of the City of Perth draw

up an assets list and make plans to sell off assets built up by all ratepayers over the long history of the City of Perth.

Ratepayers and residents of the City of Perth rightly see themselves as the equivalent of stakeholders in a company, yet they have had no say in what is happening to their company - their council. I warn the Government against treating the third sphere of government with contempt: In doing so it is treating local communities with contempt. Residents and ratepayers of the Perth City Council area currently have no elected representatives and no say in what is happening in their communities. They are rightly alarmed by the financial inaccuracy of the Carr-Fardon report and the proposals within that report to duplicate council offices at the Loftus Recreation Centre and Floreat Forum Shopping Centre, and the proposal to turn Leederville Oval into a works depot. They are also justifiably concerned about getting their share of the substantial assets of the City of Perth, their long term viability, and their capacity to pay for capital city facilities within the new towns of Cambridge and Vincent. They do not want to move to a position which equates with renting after owning their own home for years. By way of example, it is my view that they do not want to purchase services, such as rubbish and work services, on an annual basis from the central council when previously they were legitimate stakeholders in the \$12m state of the art City of Perth depot in Osborne Park.

The people of Glendalough want to be consulted on issues which affect them. They want the opportunity to have input and to be listened to. They have valuable contributions to make, especially on the delivery of services. Other areas in which particular concerns have been expressed are in the delivery of police and fire services. The Mt Hawthorn and Leederville Police Stations are far below their authorised strength and have been subject to reductions in staffing over the past year, in addition to cuts in overtime and night rosters. Residents are justifiably concerned that police services have been reduced, despite anecdotal evidence of an increasing number of incidents of assault, theft and other crimes in the suburbs. I say "anecdotal evidence" because the Opposition has been denied the relevant crime statistics information. Similarly, local people have had no say in the earmarking of the Darglish Fire Station for substantial staff and equipment reduction, which will thus place further pressure on the Osborne Park Fire Station.

Non-consultative, paternalistic approaches are not what the electors of Glendalough want. Paternalistic government should have gone out long ago. Without proper consultation, good government and good decisions cannot evolve; it can lead only to disaster. Thorough consultation and due consideration of the views of affected parties is essential. Ad hoc decisions on the deregulation of shopping hours and the closure of workplaces have proved erroneous. Simplistic answers to complex law and order problems are not the solution. In fact, paternalistic, simplistic, ad hoc solutions are not the answer to anything. Sometimes in the first instance simple, immediate solutions have appeal. It is often tempting to retreat to the past, to look back through rose coloured glasses to earlier times and latch on to rhetoric about old values, to sparing the rod and spoiling the child, to the kids that were seen and not heard, to discipline and to strict penalties.

Sometimes in idealising past generations we forget all that was bad. In previous generations many chose not to believe that a lot of problems existed. Government and the community generally did not necessarily want to confront many social problems or moral dilemmas. Previous generations did not have the standard of education or health care that exists today. Attention must be focused more solidly on our young people. We need to reinforce the positive, and provide opportunities for our young and reward their achievements. The young people of today are far more sophisticated, mature and independent than they are often given credit for. They are capable of making reasoned decisions. We need to provide opportunities for young people; to encourage them and listen to what they have to say. More generally, if Government treats the community paternalistically, people will eventually question its role and will rebel.

The challenge for Government is to tune into the 1990s and current day community expectations, instead of beating up age old diversions. Electors must be credited with reason and intelligence. Politicians generally must make a concerted effort to improve their image and to make reasoned, well considered commitments at election times rather than one line, quick fix solutions or cheap, short lived promises. I know that this is an ideal that may never be achieved in this Parliament, or in the national Parliament, but that does not mean that we should not aim for that ideal.

[Applause.]